

CENTERVILLE COMMUNITY TOUR

4/6/09

By: Centerville Development Corporation

Welcome to Centerville! This is a combination housing, economic development and historical tour. Centerville just celebrated its 125th over 4th of July weekend last summer, so we gathered much of the historical information for tours that we had during the celebration.

“Centreville” was incorporated as a community in 1883. But this was not the first site for Centerville. The first location was 2 miles west of present day Centerville. The second site of Centerville was ½ miles west and 1 mile south of present Centerville. “Centreville” was moved again, when the railroad came through in 1883. Many of the buildings were moved from “Old Centreville” to “New Centerville”.

Many states have communities with the name “Centerville”. We received our name by being the half way point on the stage coach from Yankton to Sioux Falls. We were also right between Vermillion and Swan Lake by stage. For more info on Centerville, check out our website; www.centervillesd.com.

Centerville Reconstruction Project: This house was built in 1894. It has been vacant for four years. It is considered “abandoned” and will be sold by Turner County in a tax sale. If approved for the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, the home will be demolished and either a stick built split foyer or a Governor’s House will replace it. We will target 50% of AMI.

Housing Redevelopment Commission (HRC): The City of Centerville purchased this land from the school in 2000. The HRC built the first 4-Plex around 2001. The original units are two bedroom, one bath and one stall garage. They rent for \$600/month. The second 4-Plex was built in 2006-2007. These are two bedroom, 1 ½ baths and one stall garage. They rent for \$695. The apartments are senior friendly, but not senior exclusive. All 8 units are occupied. The third unit has been bid and will begin construction this spring and will be located west of the south 4-plex.

Millennium Addition Housing Project: Centerville participated in a community assessment in 2004. The people of Centerville identified quality, affordable housing as our greatest need. Our goal is to attract young families to our community. Developers don’t come to towns the size of Centerville unless they are a few miles from Sioux Falls, so we decided to be our own developers. We subdivided the lots, secured financing (which included Ft Randall Telephone Company and South Dakota Housing), we worked with Sioux Empire Housing Partnership and acted as our own construction manager and did all of our own marketing. The results are two young families moving into the community. We have 11 additional lots to develop in this area.

Centerville Renovation Project: This house was built in 1899. It has gone through a HUD foreclosure. Our plans are to rehab it; replacing shingles, siding, rebuild garage, paint interior, remodel bathrooms & carpet bedrooms. We are targeting 80% AMI.

Dam Project: Centerville was originally a milling town. The old mill was built in 1886 and destroyed by fire in 1930. The Centerville dam has been destroyed several times over the years due to flooding of the Vermillion River. We tried for funding to rebuild, but bids exceeded \$700,000, much of the cost was associated with Topeka Shiner fish ladder. The Topeka Shiner is an endangered species and the ladder is required to assist in their migration upstream. Property and liability is assumed by the SD Game, Fish & Parks. GFP developed a plan to clean up, beautify, improve fishing access and create an area for recreation. The \$293,783.50 project began last fall and continued throughout the winter into the spring.

Bike Path: We are currently working with the National Park Service to develop a plan for a bike/walking path around Centerville. We hope to incorporate the dam and beach area in the plan.

Thomson House: This home is currently owned by USD elder law professor, Michael Myers. It was built in 1888 by F.M. Rowley. It was later purchased by James Thomson and became known as the "Thomson House". Thomson, a Scottish immigrant, worked his way up from teller to Bank of Centerville president. The home was extensively remodeled by Thomson between 1912 - 1918, with imported tiles from Scotland for fireplace and addition of porches. The garage is a double carriage house.

Gunderson Park: In 1921 T.I. Gunderson donated the land that became known as Gunderson Park. It was given on the condition that the community maintains it or it would go back to his estate. The community held up their end of the deal. They built bath houses, concession stands, playground equipment and a clubhouse. Sand was hauled in each year for "the beach", which became Gunderson Park's nickname. The work was done by volunteers, community organizations and the City of Centerville. The Beach was a popular spot for swimming, fishing, boating, family reunions and picnics. Northern States Power Company and South Dakota Livestock Feeders had their annual picnics at Gunderson Park, with more than a thousand members attending. The floods destroyed the dam several times over the years with final destruction in 1993 during what was considered the "100 year flood". The buildings at Gunderson Park were all destroyed, also the result of flood damage.

WHAM: Centerville has been involved with Ducks Unlimited for a number of years and even though this is a very worthwhile organization the local citizens felt that we saw very little of our efforts being implemented at the local level. 3 years ago a new local organization was formed called WHAM (Wildlife, Habitat and More). The purpose of this organization was to develop funds for local wildlife and habitat. This organization holds an annual fundraising banquet which usually brings in about \$10,000 each fall. With the funds from this banquet, the WHAM organization purchased a tractor and a seeder, and have planted many food plots and grass for habitat cover. They have also purchased some land that was once the old dump grounds (which is to the south of the Beach) and converted into a Pheasant Restoration project. Some of the members raise pheasants for release and each year a number of adult pheasants are purchased and released. The purchase of Quail and Turkeys are also being considered for release.

Boulevard: Centerville has a Main Street and Broadway. Most of our businesses and boulevard are located on Broadway. The boulevard was built in 1931 in spite of the Great Depression. Florence Bervin ran a greenhouse at that time. She was credited for importing night crawlers from Europe to aerate the soil. She also had a dance studio and was involved in the arts. Florence and Mrs. T.I. Gunderson are

responsible for designing and getting the boulevard built. The boulevard was renovated in 1991-1992 with the design of Mark Ostrem, Edith Lindvall's gift of underground sprinklers and the assistance of labor by Centerville's FFA Chapter. The boulevard is maintained by cooperative efforts with the City, Garden Clubs and Centerville Rotary Club.

The arts continue to play a large role in Centerville. We have a very active arts council. They present an annual musical, and also sponsor the Missoula Children's Theatre, Spirit of the Arts college scholarship and other community events.

Governor's Houses: Our first attempt at housing was building this Governor's House duplex. Built in 2000-2001, it was originally intended for senior citizens. At the time, only senior citizens or disabled were allowed to purchase them. The houses are 960 ft², with one car garage and no basement. We borrowed most of the money at the bank at regular interest rates, didn't really have a marketing plan. We struggled to sell them. After a couple years, SDHDA allowed us to rent them out. We finally sold both of them to young teachers in the Centerville School system. We felt fortunate to only have lost \$3,600 on this project.

Tuffy's Tots Daycare & Learning Center (Tuffy Tornado is Centerville's Mascot): At a community planning meeting a couple years ago, a group of young parents decided to build a community daycare. They formed their own non-profit, tax exempt organization, were given land from Good Sam, wrote a grant for a Governor's House daycare, applied for several other grants and solicited donations. They have now received over \$104,000 in grants and secured their own financing. The daycare opened on April 21st, 2008. They presently have 29 children enrolled, with total capacity of 38. They are also working with the Good Samaritan Center to develop a multigenerational program between the children and the residents of Good Sam.

Good Samaritan Center: On July 25th, 1960, the Centerville Rotary club with steering committee of Stan Schmiedt, Walt Weverstad, Virgil Brugger, Wilson Graff and Dale Merritt, recruited the Good Samaritan Society, selling five acres to them for \$1,250 to build the Good Samaritan Center. The Good Samaritan Center has been an excellent business partner and provides a great service to our community.

Veteran's Memorial:

Park, Softball Fields and CHS Athletic Field:

Peder Larson Park: named in honor of Pete Larson, Centerville mayor, owner of Pete's Locker and community leader. The city purchased 23 acres of farmland in 1960 @ \$250/acre. (Land across the road sold for \$3,500 per acre a couple years ago). The community began discussing building a swimming pool in 1962. After several battles and lutefisk supper benefits the pool finally opened on June 20th, 1966.

Pascale Fields: Softball fields were named to honor Dr. C.C. Pascale, long time Centerville doctor, committee leader and athletic supporter.

Stan Schmiedt Field: Stan was pharmacist and owner of Schmiedt Drug. Stan was another progressive community leader and great promoter of Centerville, earning him the title, “Mr. Centerville”. Stan was awarded “South Dakota’s Excellence in Economic Development” in 1999 by Governor Bill Janklow. This complex was built in 2000. It replaced the old football field and dirt track on the west side of Centerville. With our new all-weather track, we hold several track meets a year, including conference and region meets.

Al Hall House: Old farm house, purchased for \$1 and moved into Centerville in the late 1990’s. It is currently owned by Tom & Chris Cunningham.

Centerville Community Library: The Centerville School/Community Library was completed in 1993. This joint effort between the City, School and community has been used as a model for other communities in South Dakota. Last month it was recognized by the American Library Association, ALA, as a 5 star library. This award is based on programs, circulations, visits and internet terminal uses. Centerville was the first library in SD ever to receive a 5 star designation.

Centerville School: In the beginning Centerville school children met in homes. The original school was a wooden building built in 1884 across the street from our old track on the west side of Centerville. The school was built on this site in 1904/1905. In the 1930’s, during the Depression, the darker brick “fire-proof” addition was built by the Workers Progress Association, (WPA) for \$17,000, with the Federal Government providing most of the money. The fire-proof construction was a valuable feature when the school burned in 1951. The only part left standing was the WPA addition. The re-construction was complete by the fall of 1953, which still serves as the nucleus of our present school.

Construction of our original gym was completed on June 30th, 1928 for \$19,026. An addition was built in 1959 doubling its size. The community of Centerville passed a 2.1 million dollar bond issue in 1998 to build new gym, commons and music room, joining the entire school facility as one continuous building. The old gym is still used as a practice gym, for junior high basketball and tournaments, with the stage for the arts council’s plays and musicals. The old lobby now houses our before and after school program.

Our K-12 school has an enrollment of around 240 students. We have earned the designation of “distinguished school” which means that our students’ test scores have consistently improved over the past six years under the Federal “No Child Left Behind” program.

Broadway - Business District: We have been working on a Broadway Beautification Project over the past couple years. We solicit donations from businesses, organizations and individuals and are doing minor repair work, scraping and touch up painting our Main Street buildings. We have a volunteer night during the summer months with several community volunteers helping. Several of the businesses did their own beautification projects last year prior to our 125th Celebration.

In 2002 with the help of a generous donation from Doc Pascale, Pioneer Memorial Hospital purchased Centerville’s pharmacy from Stan Schmiedt. The Centerville Pharmacy outgrew its facility across the street in Centerville Medical Clinic. We are currently working on a fundraiser to build a new pharmacy. We are hoping to get started later this spring.

Our after-school program received a grant to develop this community garden. Several volunteers assisted with the project.

The Centerville Development Corporation has been working with SECOG in visiting with our local businesses to see what we can do to help them make their businesses more successful. So far we have met with over half of the local businesses. Some of the ideas are very exciting and will hopefully continue to develop.

The north building was operated by J. B. Lockhart and sold merchandise from 1910 to 1922. In 1923, First National Bank moved into this building from DeLee Knudson's building across the street. First National Bank operated at this location until December 19th, 1936, when federal bank examiners closed it down. Bank president, Robert Peterson, who was Lieutenant Governor at the time, pled guilty to falsifying a national bank report and embezzlement of \$170,000, and was sentenced to 6 years at the US Penitentiary at Leavenworth. Peterson was very well liked and many still believe he was innocent. In 1942 the post office moved into the lower level.

Just down the street was the infamous "Bloody Bucket Saloon". It was rumored that gangsters would leave Chicago, when things got a little too "hot" for them and they would travel by to smaller communities, like Centerville. They would be running booze and guns. During the 1930's Centerville was known as "Little Chicago" because it was a popular spots for gangsters to hang out. There is a story told by Fred Mart, a Centerville man, who stopped at the Bloody Bucket one night in the 30's to pick up some baked beans to take home to his wife. In the back room the banker's son, Mike Mee, was playing poker with a couple very well dressed of out-of-town gamblers. There were piles of cash lying on the floor and all three seemed to be having a good time. At the request of the owner, Bert Hart, Fred kept his eye on the out of town gamblers. One of the strangers shot a hole in the kettle of baked beans. No one talked about what went on that evening for a long time. Several years later Fred asked Bert if he knew who those gamblers were. Bert asked Fred who he thought they were. Fred said; "John Dillinger and Baby Face Nelson?" Bert answered; "That's just who they were!" See the original painting by Ron Backer, (Fred Mart's son-in-law) entitled "Poppin the Beans" depicting this event.

Agriculture: Agriculture is South Dakota's number 1 industry and has always been an important part of Centerville's history. Centerville was known as cattle feeding country. By 1886 Centerville was handling 20 trains of cattle per day. Centerville cattlemen topped the world cattle market in Chicago in 1912. Centerville was designated by the S.D. Secretary of Agriculture, "The Capital of fat hog and beef industry of the Northwest" in 1928.

There are still some small cattle feeding operations, cow herds and hogs raised in the Centerville area, but not to the extent of the early days.

Centerville is blessed with fertile farmland. In the early years, farm acreages were fairly small and diversified by feeding livestock. Today farms are more specialized, and due to changes in technology and equipment, farms are handling more acres, more efficiently. In the late 50's irrigation was introduced to the area. The irrigation created the opportunity to raise sugar beets for U&I Sugar in the early 60's, green beans and sweet corn for Green Giant in the late 60's, seed corn for Dekalb & Sokota in

the 70's and Pioneer in the 90's. Most crop acres are planted into corn and soybeans today. Farm programs and crop insurance help provide a safety net for grain farming, but we are still at the mercy of the weather, (flooding, drought, hail, early frost).

Infrastructure Projects: The City of Centerville has been working hard on replacing and improving our city's infrastructure. They have completed sanitary and storm sewer repair and also replaced and improved water lines. The next major project will be the street repair. We currently have an application with the EDA to rebuild **Colman Street**.

Peterson Home: This home belongs to Larry and Susan Overgaard, it was once the home of former Lieutenant Governor and First National Bank president, Robert Peterson.

Higgenbathem Home: This home belongs to Kevin and Sylvia Kroger and is on the National Historic Register. It was built in 1901 for Higgenbathem by Andrew Hall. Ten years ago this house was almost to the point of no return. Kevin and Sylvia purchased and renovated it to its present condition. It is currently painted its original color.

City Hall was built in 1934 by the WPA about the same time as the school addition. It also housed our library until the new library was built in 1993. Our unique standpipe water tower was completed on February 6th, 1895.